

Coming Together to Communicate the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

THE RECENTLY RELEASED 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA)¹ serves as our nation's nutrition policy backbone and an essential resource for health and nutrition professionals. Registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) rely on the evidence-based recommendations to help the public they serve make informed food and beverage choices. Now in its eighth edition, the DGA functions as a roadmap to guide Americans ages 2 years and older in preventing diet-related health conditions like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers. The DGA is also used in developing federal food, nutrition, and health policies and programs and serve as the basis for federal nutrition education materials for the public. Produced by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the DGA is updated every 5 years to reflect advancements in scientific knowledge and to translate the current science into food-based guidance to promote health in the United States.

Developing the DGA is a multi-year, multi-stage process that involves many steps both within and outside of the federal government. From reviewing the scientific evidence to developing the

DGA to implementing the DGA through various programs, RDNs play an important role in each of these stages. RDNs conduct research that continues to advance our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between diet and health. This research is reviewed by an external federal advisory committee, the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC), whose review helped inform revisions to the DGA. Members of the DGAC included RDNs, and RDNs employed by the federal government supported the DGAC throughout its work, including assisting with systematic reviews of the scientific literature, food pattern modeling, and data analyses. In addition, RDNs within the federal government were involved in writing and reviewing the 2015-2020 DGA and will assist with implementing the DGA through various federal programs and education initiatives. We also want to acknowledge the important contributions of all RDNs who took the time to provide written or oral comments throughout the process. More than 29,000 public comments were received on the *Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee* and were considered in the development of the 2015-2020 DGA.

RECOMMENDATIONS THROUGHOUT THE EIGHT EDITIONS

In 1980, the first DGA was released to advise the public on diet and health. The next edition was released in 1985, and at that time it became widely used and accepted as a framework for nutrition education messages. Each edition of the DGA reflects the latest body of science and has provided relatively consistent advice about healthy eating. Key topics such as eating a variety of foods such as fruits and vegetables, grains, dairy products, and protein foods have been included, along with recommendations to choose foods

and beverages to lower intake of saturated fats, sodium, and added sugars. Guidance about maintaining a healthy weight has also remained consistent, as well as advice about moderating alcohol consumption for adults of legal drinking age. Although science continues to evolve, many aspects of the previous DGA still ring true today.

HELPING PEOPLE MEET DIETARY GUIDANCE RECOMMENDATIONS REMAINS A CHALLENGE

About half of all American adults, 117 million individuals, have one or more preventable chronic disease, many of which are related to poor quality eating patterns and physical inactivity. Concurrent with these high rates of diet-related chronic disease, trends in food intake over time show that, at the population level, Americans are not following the recommendations of the DGA (see [Figure 1](#)). For example, Healthy Eating Index (HEI) scores, a measure of how food choices align with the DGA, and physical activity levels have remained low, while the prevalence of overweight and obesity has risen and remained high for the past 25 years. Conversely, diets with higher HEI scores have been associated with a 15% to 22% reduction in the risk for both onset of and death from cardiovascular disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes.²

Helping Americans meet DGA recommendations at the population level will require broad coordination and collaboration at all levels of society. This collective action is needed to create a new paradigm in which healthy lifestyle choices at home, school, work, and in the community are easy, accessible, affordable, and normative.

MAIN THEMES FROM THE 2015-2020 DGA

A focus of the 2015-2020 DGA is healthy eating patterns. Eating patterns are the combinations of foods and

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2015.12.010>
Published by Elsevier Inc. on behalf of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

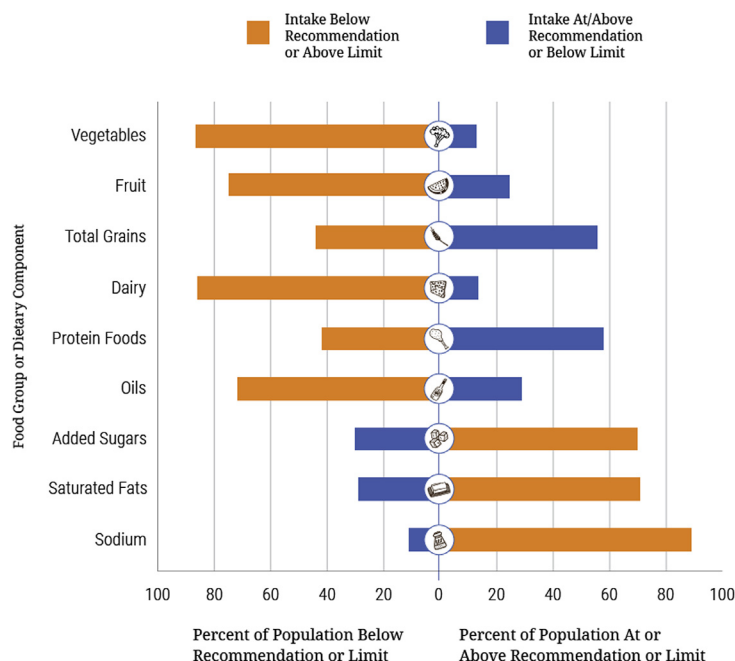


Figure 1. US dietary intake compared to Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations (percent of the US population ages 1 year and older who are below, at, or above each dietary goal or limit). Note: The center (0) line is the goal or limit. For most, those represented by the orange sections of the bars, shifting toward the center line, will improve their eating pattern. (Data Sources: What We Eat in America, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey [NHANES] 2007-2010 for average intakes by age-sex group. Healthy U.S.-Style Food Patterns, which vary based on age, sex, and activity level, for recommended intakes and limits.)

beverages that make up an individual's complete dietary intake over time. A growing body of research has examined the relationship between overall eating patterns, health, and risk of chronic disease, and findings were sufficiently well-established to support dietary guidance. The 2015-2020 DGA provides five Guidelines (see Figure 2). Additional information is provided in Key Recommendations, supporting text and appendices, which can all be found at Health.gov/DietaryGuidelines. The guidance is discussed within three chapters:

- *Chapter 1. Key Elements of Healthy Eating Patterns*—discusses the relationship of diet and physical activity to health over the life span and explains the principles of a healthy eating pattern. Example eating patterns are provided to demonstrate how individuals can follow these principles and recommendations and adapt them to personal and cultural preferences.
- *Chapter 2. Shifts Needed to Align with Healthy Eating Patterns*—compares current food and nutrient intake in the United States to recommendations and describes the shifts in dietary choices that are needed to help align current intakes with recommendations. For each food group and dietary component, current intakes are provided at the population level and by age and sex groups to describe areas where recommendations are being met but also highlight areas that need improvement.
- *Chapter 3. Everyone Has a Role in Supporting Healthy Eating Patterns*—outlines how all individuals, groups, and segments of society have an important role to play in supporting healthy eating and physical activity choices. A variety of example strategies and actions that align with the DGA are included.

The DGA is an important part of complex and multifaceted solutions to promoting health and reducing the risk of chronic disease. RDs are at the forefront of comprehensive and coordinated initiatives to reverse these and other diet-related health trends. RDs, whether working with individuals or

The Guidelines

- 1. Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan.** All food and beverage choices matter. Choose a healthy eating pattern at an appropriate calorie level to help achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, support nutrient adequacy, and reduce the risk of chronic disease.
- 2. Focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount.** To meet nutrient needs within calorie limits, choose a variety of nutrient-dense foods across and within all food groups in recommended amounts.
- 3. Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake.** Consume an eating pattern low in added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. Cut back on foods and beverages higher in these components to amounts that fit within healthy eating patterns.
- 4. Shift to healthier food and beverage choices.** Choose nutrient-dense foods and beverages across and within all food groups in place of less healthy choices. Consider cultural and personal preferences to make these shifts easier to accomplish and maintain.
- 5. Support healthy eating patterns for all.** Everyone has a role in helping to create and support healthy eating patterns in multiple settings nationwide, from home to school to work to communities.

Figure 2. The five guidelines of the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

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